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EMOTION, PERFORMANCE AND GENDER IN SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

Kristine Steenbergh

Abstract

This chapter examines the relations between the performance of emotion and the experience of self in Shakespeare's Hamlet from a gender perspective. It argues that the revenge tragedy contrasts two different models of the relation between the outward performance of emotion and the inward experience of it. On the one hand, the prince makes an often-quoted distinction between the external signs of grief and the inner self. On the other hand, the play also problematizes the effeminizing effects that the performance of emotion and the imitation of signs of anger have on the self. This chapter relates the play's representation of the relation between the performance of emotion and the self both to early modern debates about the effects of acted passion and to current (cultural-historical) theory on the transmission and effects of emotion.

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspirations of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play,
But I have that within which passes show,
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.
(Shakespeare 1982, 1.2.77-86)

With these words, Shakespeare's Hamlet distinguishes between the outward signs of grief and his inward experience of that emotion. In his view, the 'forms, moods, shapes of grief' cannot represent his being accurately: since they are outward signs, they might as well be acted. It is ironic that the dramatic character whose soliloquies in traditional criticism have come to symbolize the beginnings of inwardness and individuality in Renaissance culture, should use the trope of dramatic performance to refer to the impossibility of representing the inner self. In Katharine Eisaman Maus's *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, this quotation from Hamlet figures as a stepping stone for the exploration of inward and outward selves in early modern English culture (Maus 1995, 2).¹ She suggests that in *Hamlet*, as in early modern culture as a whole, seemingly contradictory notions of the self – as obscure on the one hand and as capable of being made fully manifest on the other – exist side by side. Indeed, the two notions are mutually constitutive: 'Hamlet claims that theatrical externals conceal an inaccessible inwardness, but stages a play to discover his uncle's secrets' (29).

Although Maus does not comment on this, both examples she uses are not only cast in terms of the theatre, but also explicitly expressed in terms of the emotions. As with the representation of inner and outer self, the play contains seemingly contradictory representations of relations between the performance of emotions and the self. In what follows, I will explore representations of the self, performance and emotions in *Hamlet* in the context of recent thinking on the history of the emotions. I will argue that even though Hamlet in the above quoted passage describes the outward signs of emotion as less trustworthy than the inward experience of passion, and compares these outward signs to 'actions that a man might play,' the tragedy at other moments does recognize the inevitable connection between the outward performance and the inward experience of emotion. Shakespeare's revenge tragedy problematizes the effects of acted passion on the self and thereby interacts with early modern debates about the way the audience experienced the passions it saw performed on the stage.

The performance of emotions, inward and outward selves in theory

The notion of performativity figures prominently in recent thinking on the history of emotions. Like Hamlet, William Reddy in his *The Navigation of Feeling* focuses on the relation between emotions and the self. He considers poststructuralist models of the self to be ineffectual, and proposes instead the concept of the double-anchored self: 'a self that cannot be encompassed within a discourse or defined by a practice; [...] a self that can be molded by discourse, altered by practice to a significant degree, but never entirely or predictably, never to the same degree from one person to the next' (Reddy 2001, 116). The reason why the self cannot be completely defined by an emotional regime lies in the concept of the emotive, a term Reddy based on J. L. Austin's speech act theory. An emotive is a type of speech act that can change a course of action because it has both an exploratory and a self-altering effect on the activated thought material of emotion. In Reddy's model, then, the forms, moods, and shapes in which an emotion is expressed can change the course of the emotion itself: the outward expression of grief alters its inward experience, and this inward experience alters the course of action of the individual. Moreover, Reddy's model views the individual experience of emotion as a means of change in greater emotional structures.

The late philosopher Teresa Brennan in her *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) also looked at emotion's capacity to induce change. She disapproves of the current focus on individual emotions in science, arguing that it stems from a western idea that 'emotions and energies are naturally contained, going no farther than the skin' (2). Her research focuses on the idea that individuals are not affectively self-contained: the emotions of one person can enter into another, and there is no secure distinction between the individual and the environment. This concept of the transmission of affect was once common knowledge, she suggests: other cultures and times were familiar with more permeable ways of being. She mentions the French early modern thinker Malebranche's thought that sadness could circulate among people, and the ways in which the mother's

emotions could affect the foetus in Renaissance thinking (16). ‘The way is open to further historical inquiry once we can make an initial case for the idea that the self-contained western identity has to be a construction,’ she argues (12).

In the early modern period, this model of exchange between the self and the environment certainly existed. In the same year that Brennan’s study was posthumously published, Gail Kern Paster’s *Humoring the Body* (2004) provided the historical evidence that Brennan hoped existed, but which lay outside of her scope of research. Paster describes the early modern model of emotions and the self before Descartes as a ‘humoral ecology,’ a system of exchange in which the view of passions and the self is characterized by fluidity, openness and permeability.² Body and mind form a whole in this model, and both are open to outside influences. A fire crackling next to a person’s body could heat up their blood, stimulating their production of choler, and make that person angry. Paster speaks of a ‘psychophysiological reciprocity between the experiencing subject and his or her relation to the world’ (19).

Jacqueline T. Miller in an inspiring article combines this notion of a permeable self with the effects of performance of emotion on the self. She argues that the gap that Hamlet signals between his inner self and outward show is not the only paradigm of selfhood in the early modern period. In the sonnets of Philip Sidney and Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*, Miller finds that the passions ‘are often portrayed as coming into being precisely through the imitation of those very signs and shows that Hamlet scorns’ (Miller 2001: 408). Miller argues that many early modern texts reveal a mode of thinking in which the imitation of the signs of another’s passion creates that emotion: ‘The passions that Hamlet situates ‘within’ are elsewhere construed as being formed from without, by the rhetor’s imprint or the adoption of the signs of another’s affect – literally, by going through the motions’ (418). Here, then, Reddy’s concept of the emotive – where the form of the emotion can change the course of that emotion itself – is merged with a model of selfhood that is more fluid and permeable than Reddy’s. Miller is interested to

know how the external becomes internal in the context of the porosity of early modern bodily selfhood. She argues that 'transferability is itself based on imitation: copying the signs of passions of others both expresses and produces the passions that create likeness' (418).

Although she uses Hamlet's view of inwardness as a point of reference throughout her article, Miller chose to 'take the issue off the stage,' as she puts it, and focus on the work of Sidney and Wroth (419n6). As a consequence, her interpretation of Shakespeare's revenge tragedy remains rather one-sided, since she argues that Hamlet only situates the passions within and rejects other modes of thinking about the passions that involve imitation and transferability. In what follows, I will argue that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* cannot be reduced to the single paradigm that Miller distils from the play. Rather, an examination of the play in the light of the theories here reviewed shows that the play also features the paradigm that Miller finds in Sidney and Worth, in which passions are formed by the imitation of outward signs. Indeed, Hamlet shows himself to be aware of the effects of imitated passion on the emotional economy. The play shows how the prince wants to use the power of imitation to incite the passion of anger needed for the act of revenge, but also shies away from it.³ The play hints at anxieties about the loss of masculinity through the effects of imitated passion. As a whole, the play problematizes the conflict between co-existing early modern paradigms of the relation between the self, the passions, and notions of performance.

The effects of performed passion

Whereas Hamlet in his words to his mother characterizes true emotion as 'that within', something that cannot be performed, he displays a different view of the relation between the self and outward signs of emotion when a group of travelling players arrives at Elsinore. At this point in the play, the ghost of his father has appeared to impress upon Hamlet the duty of blood revenge for his murder.

The prince asks the players for ‘a passionate speech’ (2.2.393) and witnesses how an actor is driven to tears by his own story about queen Hecuba. He wonders about the emotions that the performance evokes in the actor, and compares the latter’s motivation to his own:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
 Could force his soul so to his own conceit
 That from her working all his visage wanned,
 Tears in his eyes, distraction in’s aspect,
 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
 With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing?
 For Hecuba!
 What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
 That he should weep for her? What would he do,
 Had he the motive and the cue for passion
 That I have?

(2.2.503-14)

Here, the representation of the relation between the self and outward signs of emotion differs from Hamlet’s earlier view on the matter. The actor adapts his soul to the imitation of Hecuba’s grief in such a way that he experiences that grief himself. It is the ‘working’ of his performance that induces emotions. As Philip Edwards remarks in a footnote to these lines, the player ‘doesn’t pretend to cry; he pretends until he cries’ (Shakespeare 1982: 2.2.508-9n). The performance of emotion in this passage functions in the way of Reddy’s emotive: it is a speech act that alters the emotional economy of the actor. Miller’s concept of imitation is central here: it is by imitating the emotions of Hecuba, by mimesis, that the actor experiences her emotions as if they were his own.

These ideas about the performativity of emotions and the transmission of affect figure also in early modern thinking about the actor’s techniques. It was essential for the transmission of emotion

to an audience that the actor experienced that affect himself. The Roman rhetorician Quintilian wrote that 'the prime essential for stirring the emotions of others, is [...] first to feel those emotions oneself' (qtd. in Roach 1985, 24). To do so, the actor needs to shape what one treatise on the passions calls an 'externall image of an internal minde' (Wright 1604, 176). The image that the actor conjures in his mind's eye brings about a bodily reaction. The mental image moves the soul in the same way as if the senses reacted to actual objects. The actor then translates the passion triggered by this mental image into an external image – an image that incorporates the entire body. His movements transform the air through which he moves, sending out ripples of emotion. His passions subsequently enter the spectators through their eyes and ears, and transfer the contents of his heart to theirs (Smith 2004, 136, drawing on Roach 1985). Thomas Wright in his treatise on the passions describes the process as follows:

Thus we moue, because by the passion thus wee are mooued, and as it hath wrought in vs so it ought to worke in you. Action then vniuersally is a naturall or artificiall moderation, qualification, modification, or composition of the voice, countenance, and gesture of bodie proceeding from some passion, and apt to stirre up the like (Wright 1604, 176).

The passion that the actor or orator imitates, moves his own passions and then proceeds to move the audience. The notion of imitation is central to the process of acting: the actor himself imitates the passions of his fictional subject, and the passions thus created in the actor 'stirre up the like,' as Wright puts it: they cause the audience to imitate the actor's passions.

Debates on the effects of acted passion

Different opinions existed in the early modern period about the effect of acted passions on the audience as well as on the actor himself. As will be shown below, the debate between defenders and

opponents of the theatre hinged on notions of reason and passion, imitation and infection, porous and controlled boundaries of the body, as well as masculinity and femininity.⁴ For Sir Philip Sidney, the ability to 'stirre up the like' is what enables the theatre to teach the audience lessons, and to shape proper masculine behaviour. In his *Apology for Poetry* (1595), he argued that poetry is a better instrument to teach virtue than either history or philosophy, because it is able to 'strike, pierce, [and] possess the sight of the soul' by means of what he calls its 'passionate describing of passions' (Sidney 2002, 83 and 90).⁵ Poetry's capacity to 'work substantially' (85) has a transformative power that can be harnessed to produce virtues that Sidney deems essential for Englishmen, such as fortitude and courage.

The bodily operations of passion are not seen as a threat to rational judgement in these defences of the theatre. On the contrary, the movement of the emotions is a crucial step in clarifying the difference between virtue and vice: it is through emotional experience that the audience is able to draw lessons from a theatre performance. This applies also to the stage's ability to instruct an audience about the nature of the emotions itself. Whereas philosophers can only warn their readers about the dangers of anger in dry texts, Sidney writes, the theatre can bring this idea to life and move its audience to a deeper understanding of its force. 'Anger, the Stoics say, was a short madness: let but Sophocles bring you Ajax on a stage, killing and whipping sheep and oxen, thinking them the army of Greeks [...] and tell me if you have not *a more familiar insight into anger* than finding in the schoolmen his genus and difference' (91; emphasis mine). Similarly, 'the sour-sweetness of revenge in Medea' in Sidney's view is more effective than a philosophical exposé on the evils of revenge (91). In this defence of the theatre, then, the actor's ability to embody the passion that he imagines in his mind's eye, is able to transmit to the audience a sense of anger that tells them more about the emotion than a Stoic treatise.

Sidney views the theatre's capacity to move an audience and teach them virtue as a means to shape proper Englishmen. He

writes that men who read novels 'have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy, liberality, and especially courage' (95) and that 'bravery of mind [is] taught by [the performance of] Achilles rather than by hearing the definition of Fortitude' (105). Thomas Heywood in his defence of the theatre, written in the early seventeenth century and in different theatrical circumstances than Sidney's defence, is still of the opinion that 'so bewitching a thing is liuely and well spirited action, that it hath power to new mold the harts of the spectators and fashion them to the shape of any noble and notable attempt.' (Heywood 1973, sig. B4r). Acted passion can serve as an instrument to shape virtuous and courageous Englishmen.

This is not, however, how anti-theatrical authors thought about the operations of acted passion. They were afraid that the strutting and the bellowing, the rhetoric and the bodily movement of the actor could infect the audience, crossing the boundary between stage and pit. Laura Levine has described how early modern opponents of the theatre compare plays to magic that can turn the spectators into aggressive beasts or will-less robots: a play can induce audience members to imitate the action they see on stage (Levine 1994, 13-14). Whereas defences of the theatre conceive of the audience as a rational (masculine) organism that is capable of judgment, opponents of the stage see spectators as passive (feminine) receptacles on whom the passions work, infecting their mind through their eyes and to a lesser extent, their ears. Stephen Gosson, for example, writes that:

Tragedies and Comedies stirre up affections, and affections are naturally planted in that part of the minde that is common to us with brute beastes [...] The diuel is not ignorant how mightely these outward spectacles *effeminate*, and *soften* the hearts of men, vice is learned in the beholding [...] and those impressions of mind are secretly conueyed ouer to the gazers, which the players do counterfeit on stage (Gosson 1972, sigs. F1r and G4r; emphasis mine).

In this view, the passions work on the level of the mind that humans share with animals: the rational judgement does not exercise influence over the effects of acted passion, since the impressions are 'secretly' conveyed to the spectators, softening and effeminising them. The passions operate secretly, bypassing reason and working directly on the senses. Acted passion infects the porous bodies of the audience and induces them to imitate the emotion they see performed. Gender plays a significant role in this debate. Whereas Sidney viewed poetry as an instrument to shape English masculinity, opponents of the theatre feared that acted passion would soften the hearts of men, rendering them effeminate. In the words of William Prynne, acted passion makes men 'mimicall, histrionically, [...] apish, amorous, and unmanly, both in their habites, gestures, speeches, complements, and their whole deportment: enervating and resolving the virility and vigour of their mindes' (Prynne 1633, sig. Eee*2r). The effects of acted passion could thus emasculate male spectators.

Apart from the dangers for spectators, opponents of the theatre also warn of the threat to the actor himself, for his heart and mind could be overwhelmed by the emotion he performs. A notable example of this danger can be found in an early modern anecdote relating how a Roman emperor once performed the title role in Seneca's tragedy *Hercules Furens*. He became possessed by the fury of the avenger that he was merely imitating, with tragic consequences for the slave who played opposite him:

although he was, as our Tragedians use, but seemingly to kill him by some false imagined wound, yet was *Caesar* so extremely carried away with the violence of his practised fury, and by the perfect shape of the madnesse of *Hercules*, to which he had fashioned all his active spirits, that he slew him dead at his foot, & after swoong him *terq; quaterq;* (as the Poet sayes) about his head. (Heywood 1973, Sig. E3v).

The danger for the actor then, in rendering the perfect shape of anger, 'fashioning all his active spirits' to the performance of the passion, is that the desired anger is indeed engendered in the actor, but to such an extent that he loses control over his performance.

The difference between a controlled effect of acted passions and the loss of reason is often expressed in terms of gender. In Thomas Wright's treatise on the passions, the bodily, irrational effects of passion are gendered feminine and are explicitly contrasted to the controlled, rational, masculine management of the emotions. Wright, like Sidney, does not think that the passions should be completely suppressed. Instead, they should be harnessed in the service of virtue.⁶ It is essential for the orator 'whose project is persuasion' (172), to experience the passion he expresses: 'If I must bee moued by thy persuasions,' he writes, 'first thou must shew me by passion, they persuaded thy selfe' (173). One way to achieve the desired effect, is by means of imitation.⁷ This process of imitation is gendered in Wright's work. Urging his readers to take good note of passionate people in their surroundings, he offers the example of the 'furious fashion' of women:

Their voice is loud and sharpe, and consequently apt to cut, which is proper to ire and hatred, which wish ill, and intend revenge: their gestures are frequent, their faces inflamed, their eyes glowing, their reasons hurry one in the necke of another, they with their fingers number the wrongs offered them, the harmes, injuries, disgraces & what not, thought, said, and done against them? (180)

Wright urges his reader to imitate the gestures of these furious women, but not their excess: 'if a prudent oratour could in this case better their matter, circumsise the weakenesse of the reason, abate the excesse of their furie, certainly he might win a pretie forme for framing his action' (181). The orator imitates the passion he intends to incite in a controlled manner, avoiding precisely the excess of fury that marks the woman's desire for revenge. Against the image

of the natural, bodily, passionate and unbridled aspects of women's anger, the treatise constructs an artificial, rational, stage-managed and controlled male method of persuasion. Masculine anger in this passage is a political passion: it is the kind of anger that is profitable both to the 'ciuill Gentleman and prudent politician' (5-6).

The effects of acted passion in Shakespeare's Hamlet

Hamlet's view on emotions and the self with which this article opened seems to run counter to the idea that an actor or orator creates an emotion through the imitation of outward signs. Whereas Hamlet in that passage distinguished between 'that within' and outward 'show,' other texts construct an intimate relation between the outward performance of emotion and its inward experience. And yet, I will argue that rather than presenting this one view of the relation between performed emotions and the self, Shakespeare's revenge tragedy as a whole problematizes this conflict of opinions on the effects of acted passion. The genre of revenge tragedy conventionally thinks about the self in terms of imitation and performance, and as will be shown below, Shakespeare's revenge play, which comes relatively late in the tradition, takes this concern with the relation between the actor's performed emotions and his sense of self as one of its themes.

In Seneca's tragedies as well as in the popular revenge tragedies of the commercial theatres, the pursuit of revenge is often associated with the concept of imitation. In a very literal sense, the act of revenge often replicates the original crime, restoring the balance that was disturbed by the first deed. In *A Theater of Envy*, René Girard argues that the notion of imitation inherent in revenge is precisely what keeps Hamlet from the execution of his duty to avenge his father's murder. Although he is aware of the social pressures that weigh on him, Hamlet feels that he will become like his uncle if he kills him: 'the crime by Claudius looks to him like one more link in an already long chain, and his own revenge will look like still another link, perfectly identical to all the other links' (Gi-

rard 1991, 273). The imitation of the murderer causes the revenger to lose his sense of self: he becomes one with a community of murderers.⁸ But in another sense, too, the genre plays with notions of imitation and performance.

The moment at which a character becomes an avenger, turns away from obedience to the law, is often marked by the imitation of literary *exemplae* of revenge. When Lucretia in Barnes' *The Devil's Charter* (1607) vows revenge upon her husband who has 'betraid [her] honor, wrong'd [her] bed,' for example, she grafts her plot on the examples of classical female revenges:

All sinnes have found examples in all times
If womanly thou melt then call to minde,
Impatient Medeas wrathfull furie,
And raging Clitemnestraes hideous fact,
Prognos strange murther of her onely sonne,
And Danaus fifty Daughters (all but one)
That in one night, their husbands sleeping slew.
My cause as just as theirs, my heart as resolute,
My hands as ready. Gismond I come,
Haild on with furie to revenge these wrongs.

(Barnes 1980, 1.5.585-94)

Lucretia shows herself thoroughly aware of the literary tradition that she will choose to become part of. She calls to mind examples of classical female vengeance as models to imitate, because of their 'wrathfull furie' and their 'raging,' so that she too is 'haild on with furie' to the execution of her plot of revenge.

In *Hamlet*, echoes of earlier revenge tragedies can be seen to operate in a similar way. Hamlet famously employs a play to 'catch the conscience of the King' (2.2.601), but he also uses the parts he requests the travelling players to perform as a means to incite choler and vindictiveness in himself. At various points in the tragedy, Hamlet is portrayed as using the performance of Senecan rhetoric and 'passionate action' (3.2.130) to evoke in himself the desired

emotion of vindictiveness. When the players arrive at Elsinore, Hamlet demands from them the 'passionate speech' of Pyrrhus' revenge on Priam, possibly as a means to spur his own revenge. In contemporary culture, 'fell revenging Pyrrhus' was known as the kind of passionate, violent, and determined revenger that Hamlet aims to be. Pyrrhus's qualities unite both the dedication to his father's command of blood revenge, and the unbridled murdering rage necessary to enact that deed: a combination that Hamlet seeks to achieve throughout the play.

The First Player's tale is exceptional in terms of its archaic use of verse and style. It has been argued that the particular style of the passage serves to set it off from the main play as a performance within a performance.⁹ The play's reference to an older dramatic genre in this scene, however, does not serve a merely formalistic function. Indeed, the style of the passage is closely connected to the contents. The tale of Pyrrhus's violent retribution on the murderer of his father is cast in the rhetorical style of the early Elizabethan translations of Seneca's tragedies.¹⁰ Associated with excessive theatrical emotion, the style of the actor's lines matches their story of extreme vengeful passion. After the player has performed his speech, the prince wonders what this actor would do, had he 'the motive and the cue for passion' that the prince himself has. Hamlet here conceives of his own emotions in theatrical terms, and wonders why his own outward performance does not match the player's even though his reasons for grief and anger are real and not fictional.

Whenever the prince seeks to attain the furious mood that will allow him to execute his revenge, the play reverts to Senecan rhetoric. Howard Felperin has argued that the *Mousetrap*, the play-within-the-play that finally confirms Hamlet in his suspicions of his uncle, is written in precisely such a style:

The Murder of Gonzago represents [...] a typical revenge action of what might be termed the first wave, of the kind produced during the late 1580s and early 1590s. [...] The six lines [of] Lucianus are in a vein similar to students of those first-wave

revenge plays – *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Soliman and Perseda*, *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, and (dare I say it?) the *Ur-Hamlet*. [...] At the very center of *Hamlet*, then, we have a substantial fragment of a primitive Elizabethan revenge tragedy (Felperin 1977, 47–48).

Such early revenge rhetoric incites Hamlet to try on the part of avenger. After the performance of the play-within-the-play, he claims he is ready to ‘drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on’ (3.2.380–81), and at Ophelia’s grave he is prepared to imitate Laertes’ passionate rhetoric when he tells him: ‘Nay, and thou’lt mouth, | I’ll rant as well as thou’ (5.1.278–79). But, as Gertrude also perceives, these fits of passion do not last long in him, and he is soon ‘as patient as the female dove’ (5.1.281). It is characteristic of the prince’s humoral economy that he is more receptive to Hecuba’s grief than to Phryrrhus’ choler (see also Paster 2004, 46–48).¹¹

I think that the prince’s reluctance to devote himself wholly to vindictive passion is paradoxically informed by the same genre of Senecan tragedy that sometimes manages to incite a vengeful mood in him. Hamlet is aware of the madness that may characteristically result from the devotion to revenge. As will be shown below, his familiarity with the conventions of revenge tragedy allows him to dissemble and play the part of the conventional avenger, but his grasp of the theatrical role of the avenger is part and parcel of his hesitation to engage in the act of revenge itself: he knows what conventionally happens to those characters who devote themselves wholly to the fury of vindictiveness. Although the ghost warns Hamlet not to taint his mind, the very genre of the play dictates that the stage avenger should do exactly so: the avenger conventionally goes mad in the performance of his role.¹²

In Senecan revenge tragedy, the effects of anger on the avenger are often represented as a bodily process that lies outside the character’s control. Charles and Elaine Hallett define the madness of the avenger as ‘the overthrow of reason by the passion of revenge’

(1980, 62). They conclude that in order to act, an avenger must pass beyond the rational world: passion must consume his entire being. The desire for revenge may cause the loss of the avenger's selfhood and integrity, since all his rational capacities need to submit to violent passion. In the words of Alison Findlay, 'for men, a danger of taking personal revenge was that, rather than being a means of asserting independent subjectivity, it could be a way of losing one's self' (1990, 60).

The stereotypical madness of the avenger was associated in theatrical tradition with excessive emotion as well as extravagant rhetoric. At the time that *Hamlet* was written, the avenger possessed by vengeful passion had become such a stock character that the genre of revenge tragedy was mocked for its excessive display of violent passion. At the turn of the sixteenth century, Senecan revenge tragedy was going out of dramatic fashion. Although *The Spanish Tragedy* was still hugely popular with certain audiences and held steady for fifty years in the amphitheatres, theatrical taste was changing and playwrights such as Shakespeare and Jonson mocked the exaggerated styles of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* or Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* as 'outmoded and overwrought' (Wiggins 2000, 56). The anonymous *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599) derides the stock character of the 'filthie wining ghost' lapped in a foul sheet, 'skreaming like a pigge halfe stickt, | And [crying] Vindicta, revenge, revenge' (Induction ll. 54-57). A similar treatment was accorded to *The Spanish Tragedy* by Jacobean satirists who remembered the play for its excess of theatrical emotions and rhetoric. Revenge tragedy had come to be associated with what Hamlet calls 'strutting and bellowing'.

The prevailing disapproval of overwrought theatrical emotion was attached especially to the performance of the vindictive emotion itself. Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* (1598) for example, mocks the conceited oratorical style of the soliloquy in which Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* hesitatingly abandons faith in justice and God (Jonson 1966, 1.4.44-56). Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1600), a play performed by the boy actors of St Paul's, simi-

larly targets the performance of vindictive passion. The play is considered by some critics to be a parody on the genre of revenge tragedy as a whole. R. A. Foakes argues that it was written for 'child actors consciously ranting in oversize pants, and we are not allowed to take their passions or motives seriously' (qtd. in Marston 1978, 35). In the eyes of the Neostoic Pandulpho in the play, valour is not to 'swagger, quarrel, swear, stamp, rave and chide | To stab in fume of blood' (Marston 1978, 1.5.77-78). Therefore, when his son is murdered, he derides the pattern set by the theatrical performers of revenge before him:

Wouldst have me cry, run raving up and down
For my son's loss? Wouldst have me turn rank mad,
Or wring my face with mimic action,
Stamp, curse, weep, rage, and then my bosom strike?
Away, 'tis apish action, player-like.

(1.5.76-80)

Pandulpho stresses the importance of the imitation of the traditional outward signs of vindictiveness to the character of the avenger in revenge tragedy. The traditional avenger mimics the 'action' that in stage conventions is associated with vindictiveness: the stamping, cursing, weeping, raging and the striking of one's bosom. This particular avenger does not want to 'turn rank mad' from the self-altering effects of these emotives. He considers them 'apish action, player-like' and prefers to use his own discretion rather than imitate others' emotions.

Hamlet at certain points in the play similarly seems to consider the performance of passion in older revenge tragedies as archaic and offending, as appears from his advice to the travelling players. In his welcome to the troupe, he instructs them to act 'gently' since, he explains, 'it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags [...]. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-Herods Herod. Pray you avoid it' (3.2.4-14). The theatrical types that

Hamlet here marks as repulsive for their 'scenicall strutting [and] furious vociferation,' are stock figures of theatrical rage. Termagant is a 'noisy violent personage in the Mystery plays,' and Herod is the biblical tyrant known for his violent fury (Jenkins in Shakespeare 1982, 3.2.14n).¹³

Whenever the prince does indulge in a display of emotional vengefulness, he is the first to correct himself. He privately rages against Claudius and calls him a '[b]loody, bawdy villain! | Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!' (2.2.576-77), a soliloquy that in the Folio text of the play ends with the distinctly Senecan exclamation: 'Oh vengeance!' (F2.2.578). Scott Kastan comments that Hamlet here 'struts and bellows with the impassioned theatricality of the stage revenger' (Scott Kastan 1987, 116; see also Mercer 1987, 195). The next line of the soliloquy, however, departs from this Senecan rhetoric of revenge, and Hamlet chides himself for his lack of action:

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my hearts with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion! Fie upon't! Foh!

(2.2.578-85)

As the son of a murdered father, Hamlet feels he should fulfil his duty of blood revenge and enact the kind of decisive retribution that Laertes seeks to take for the death of Polonius. Instead, he finds himself echoing the rhetoric of the stage avenger – the Senecan rhetoric of passion. Hamlet associates this rhetoric with women and the lower classes, with the ranting of prostitutes (whore, drab) and foul-mouthed kitchen servants (scullion). Women in humoral discourse were considered innately incapable of self-control, especially with regard to the passion of anger, and the women that Hamlet refers to are proverbially 'open'. Patricia Parker has written

that in early modern culture, anxieties over performative rhetorical excess found expression in the comparison of an expansive style to the 'dilated' body of the whore or harlot (1987, 23), and this is precisely what Hamlet could mean here when he refers to himself as a whore: he is worried that he indulges too much in rhetorical and passionate excess.

Hamlet is aware that he needs to rehearse the rhetoric of revenge, the Senecan imagery of blood, night, and murder, in order to enact his revenge. He hesitates, however, to dedicate himself wholly to this passion of vindictiveness and the loss of selfhood that inevitably lies contained within it. His anxieties about the madness that the dedication to revenge conventionally entails, are connected to anxieties over the performative aspects of emotions and the self. These are expressed by means of a gendered contrast between a controlled rational revenge, and the excesses of vindictive fury personified in the whore, the drab and the kitchen maid. Rather than distinguishing between an authentic inner self and outward signs of emotion, Hamlet at these moments in the play is aware of the transferability of passion through imitation as well as the self-altering effects of emotions. He is wary of the use of imitation to incite the passions necessary to perform his revenge, because the imitation of the conventional signs of fury might have uncontrollable effects on him. Interestingly, it is only when he sees his mother murdered before his eyes that he manages to combine his duty of blood revenge with the necessary anger and vengefulness to kill Claudius. When Hamlet tells us that he is not like Hercules (1.2.152-53), he may refer to the epitome of classical heroic manhood and mean that he is not able to perform the heroic revenges that his father could. Hercules, however, was also current in early modern culture as the 'Hercules Furens' of Seneca's tragedy, in whom the vengeful goddess Juno induces a bout of vindictive fury which leads him to think he is taking revenge on his enemies, while in reality his anger is vented on his own family members. This is the man whose archaic rhetoric of revenge came to be known as

'Ercles vein,' the kind of passionate rhetoric that drives a man to madness.

What I have argued, then, is that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* does not exclusively situate the emotions 'within' the early modern body. The tragedy brings into play various different views of the relation between emotions, performance, and the self. In Hamlet's words to his mother, the prince suggests that true emotions are not to be found in the 'forms, moods and shapes' that are expressed outwardly. When he arranges the staging of 'The Mousetrap,' however, Hamlet wants to use the performance of a murder similar to that of his father to see how King Claudius reacts to the play, paradoxically assuming that he can read his true feelings in his outward expressions. I have argued that the play also draws on yet another paradigm, which Jacqueline Miller describes but did not find in the play: the paradigm in which emotions are shaped from without, by the adoption of the signs of another's affect. In the case of *Hamlet*, the emotion of anger necessary for the execution of revenge is represented as being formed by the imitation of the Senecan rhetoric and passions of early revenge tragedies. The play seems to suggest that its protagonist is aware of the dangers that adhere to the imitation of passion, the risk that the emotion might overtake the imitator, leading to a loss of self-control in mad fury. Reddy's concept of the emotive is combined in this view with Brennan's notion of the transferability of emotion: through imitation of the outward signs and rhetoric, an emotion can be transferred from a literary genre to a living person.

Notes

¹ See Aers 1992 for an insightful deconstruction of the traditional assumption that the individualised subject emerges in the Renaissance and particularly in *Hamlet* (as it can be found, for example, in Barker's *The Tremulous Private Body*).

² On this idea of the body as permeable, see also Gowing 2003.

- Notes continued -

³ David Scott Kastan has thoroughly explored the role of imitation in *Hamlet*. He reads the topic in the context of the conventions of literary imitation in early modern England, rather than in the context of emotions, gender and the self.

⁴ On anti-theatricality and the debates about the theatre, see Levine 1994. On a related subject, Katherine Craik (2007) has recently given a wonderful analysis of early modern thinking on the effects of the reading of literature on masculinity in early modern England.

⁵ With the word poetry, Sidney refers not only to poems, but also to all fictional works, including romances and plays.

⁶ 'Passions are not only, not wholly to be extinguished (as the Stoicks seemed to affirme) but sometimes to be moued, & stirred vp for the service of vertue,' he writes.

⁷ See also Miller 2001.

⁸ See also Scott Kastan 1987.

⁹ Jenkins writes: 'The play within the play is at once marked off from the surrounding dialogue by the rhyming couplets and by an artificial elaboration of style characteristic of an older period. [...] There is no reason to suspect parody' (long note to 3.2.15-55). Similarly, Gurr argues: 'Their leader, in giving a patently poetic piece of declamation, simply provides a contrast with Hamlet [...] the actor of the First Player provides a level of recitation in comparison with which the actor of Hamlet seems completely natural' (Gurr 1963, 100).

¹⁰ Brower 1971: 291. Brower adds also that it features those characteristics of the Elizabethan Roman-heroic style that also occurs in descriptions of the ghost: 'noun and epithet phrases like 'the rugged Pyrrhus,' 'the ominous horse,' 'the hellish Pyrrhus' and 'Th'unnerved father'.

¹¹ On grief, gender and the psychoanalytical concept of transference in *Hamlet*, see Grossman 2003. On masculinity and emotion in early modern literature, see also Vaught 2008.

¹² Robert Miola describes the double bind that this command poses when he writes that 'Hamlet can only live up to the demands of *pietas* by acting with *impius furor*. This is the paradox that confounds [his] morality and threatens [his] humanity' (Miola 1992, 278).

– *Notes continued* –

¹³ Braden writes that Herod anticipates ‘many of the general features I have been calling Senecan. Herod’s spectacular ravings were an obligatory high point of the pageant, and within them remarkably ‘Senecan’ figures of speech can develop’ (Braden 1985, 179).

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